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ABSTRACT

Major historical work or chronicles of the field of college reading and study-skills instruction are identified, and 10 directions for further historical research are proposed. One approach for recounting the field's history is extensive chronicles that integrate a multitude of primary and secondary historical sources. The second major category of historical literature consists of historical summaries or outlines of the field, which highlight events or trends in the field. Compared to chronicles, summaries are less ambitious in their coverage of the occurrences and concerns of the varied areas. Works in the third category, historically important monographs and texts, were not issued initially as historical discussions but have assised the college reading specialist in understanding trends. The following topics for future historical research are considered: judging the impact of historical events, focusing on an era, assessing the impact of individuals, consulting the experienced, noting trends in programs, tracing changes in materials, observing changes across textbook editions, judging innovation, appraising elements of instrumentation, and creating archives. (SW)

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College Reading and Learning Assistance

Technical Report 85-01

Avenues for Chronicling and Researching the History of College Reading and Study Skills Instruction

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Avenues for Chronicling and Researching the History of College Reading and Study Skills Instruction

As the field of college reading and study-skills instruction moves into the latter 1980's and early 1990's, we approach the centennial of the first collegiate reading improvement experiment (Abell, 1894) and mark 75 years of postsecondary reading improvement services (Leedy, 1958; Lowe, 1970). Despite its surely rich and valued history, there are only limited sources which chronicle and/or analyze historically the development and growth of the field. Yet any meaningful innovation for the future will be only as strong as the originator's critical understanding of the historical factors affecting our forefathers' successes and failures.

The traditionally quoted historical treatises on the pedagogy of reading (Huey, 1908, 1968; Mathews, 1966; Robinson, 1977; Smith, 1965; Venezky, 1984), while directing some discussion to classic research studies with college students (e.g., Buswell, 1939; Robinson, 1933), direct scant attention, at best, to the germination and later maturation of the college reading and study-skills movement. These existing attempts to recount the field's history may be grouped into three categories of research: (1) extensive chronicles, which integrate a multitude of primary and secondary historical sources; (2) summaries or timelines, which highlight major events or trends in

the field; and (3) monographs and texts, which have gained historical importance over the years. Within each category, however, only a sparsity of literature can be found. This dearth of information may explain why specialists in college reading and study-skills instruction tend to overlook the historical roots of the field when designing programs, developing curriculum, writing texts, and undertaking empirical research. Given this premise of paucity, the purpose of the following paper becomes twofold. First, the major historical works or chronicles of the field will be noted and then ten directions for further historical research will be proposed.

Historical Sources of College Reading Instruction

Historical Chronicles. The most widely recognized historical chronicle of college reading and study-skills instruction is the classic dissertation by Paul Leedy (1958). Using an extensive number of primary sources, Leedy employed historical research methodology to demonstrate the relationships and interrelationships of the events, research, and influential personalities shaping the field. Basically, his dissertation (1) noted the role of reading in higher education as a discrete academic activity from the early 1600's to the beginnings of the 20th century; (2) demonstrated how the early investigations on the psychology of reading, particularly eye movement research by Javal, Quantz, Huey, Dearborn, and Buswell, provided the impetus for the birth of reading improvement services for college

students; (3) traced the growth of the college reading and study-skills movement by examining content of texts, program descriptions, state and national surveys, research reports, and position papers dating back to the turn of the century; and (4) assessed the state of the art in the latter 1950's by reporting on survey data from 92 institutions across the nation.

A second but lesser known work containing aspects of a historical report is W. S. Blake's dissertation (1953). This work presented the historical, sociological, and educational forces which helped to create the study-skills programs in postsecondary institutions during the first half of the century. Along with historical information, Blake discussed the program at the University of Maryland and presented the findings of a national survey of college study skills centers.

Two additional sources which fall pragmatically within the historical chronicle category are the dissertations by Bailey (1982) and Sanders (1979). Bailey (1982) undertook an extensive review of the experimental research on college reading and study-skills instruction published in American journals between 1925 and 1980. He identified 170 articles appearing in 31 journals, classified these studies into 12 instructional categories, summarized each article briefly and then, with a team, used a rating scale to evaluate each article. Sanders (1979) discussed historical trends in the field and summarized 81 investigations. He employed the meta analysis procedure (Glass, 1976) to evaluate

published research reports relating to the effectiveness of college reading programs. Although both studies were interested primarily in those aspects of college reading instruction that are of instructional merit, the works are also of import to historians, since the writers effectively chronicled many of the writings that shaped the growth of college reading instruction.

Historical Summaries. Historical summaries or outlines of the field, the second major category of historical literature, also span the years, but these works are less ambitious in their coverage of the occurrences and concerns of the varied eras. Two authors (Enright, 1975; Lowe, 1967, 1970) have written historical summaries that provide a basic understanding of the roots of college reading instruction. A. J. Lowe (1967) used reviews of 49 state, regional, and national surveys to profile the programmatic developments and growth of the field since the second decade of the century. In a later paper, Lowe (1970) traced the history of the field on a decade-by-decade basis, paying careful attention to the major trends of instruction. Similarly, Enright's decade-by-decade summary (1975) examined the development of the learning assistance program through its historical ties to college reading. Still one additional source of data is Maxwell's (1979) timeline, which denotes those milestones in higher education which impacted on college reading instruction over the years.

Historically Important Texts. Works in the third category

of literature, historically important texts, were not issued initially as historical discussions. Yet, because the publication of monographs and texts on college reading and study-skills instruction has been limited over the years, this body of work assumes greater historical importance than do similar publications at the elementary and secondary levels. These publications assist the college reading specialist in gaining a clear and comprehensive understanding of the trends in the pedagogical thought, the research concerns, and the curricular design for each of the identifiable eras spanning the century. For instance, Francis P. Robinson's classic study-skills texts (1941, 1946), and Frances O. Triggs' text (1943), extensively employed the influential theory and "cutting-edge" research of the era before World War II in discussing or footnoting the concepts presented in each book. Several additional sources also highlight the thinking of a particular period. For instance, the papers in Leedy (1964) trace the growth of the field from the years of the first G.I. Bill through the days of the Great Society in the early 1960's. Kerstein's annotated bibliography (1971) places primary emphasis on the community college reading programs of the 1960's and early 1970's. Ahrendt (1975) covers the years of rapid growth for college reading by stressing the thoughts in the field from the mid 1960's through the mid 1970's. Finally, Maxwell (1979) presents the important trends of the latter 1970's. It is through such texts that specialists can

develop important historical perception not usually gleaned from a single program description, a report of empirical research, or an individual position paper. In a sense, these selected monographs and texts present the state of the art for specific eras and reveal how the field has grown over the years.

Directions for Future Historical Research

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth the full range of issues and methods of historiography, several brief points should be set forth. First, while historical research is similar to the literature review section of an article or a chapter of a dissertation, the historical study is more exhaustive because it presents information from a greater number of sources. These sources are often older than those found in most literature reviews and, in addition, they are drawn from a broader range of published materials and fugitive data sources. The goal of the historical researcher, then, is to reconstruct the past objectively and systematically through the collection, evaluation, verification, and synthesis of a broad range of evidence in order to establish facts and draw defensible interpretations or conclusions, as related to prestated hypotheses.

The key to the historical study (Gray, 1964) is the selection of a topic that has value to the field from three standpoints: (1) originality that leads to new evidence or new interpretations, (2) practicality of the task and availability of

primary sources, and (3) unity of theme which offers direction for the investigation. With these points in mind, the authors call for additional historical research in college reading and study skills. The ten topics which follow are not exhaustive; rather, they provide a logical basepoint for possible research.

Topic One: Judging the Impact of Historical Events

The college reading field does not exist in a world unto itself but rather is a part of the greater academic and national communities. Accordingly, major events in the educational, national, and international arenas have influenced the field. Research is needed which traces the impact of various historical events of the latter 19th century and the 20th century upon the college reading and study-skills movement. Examples of possible research questions include:

1. What were the short-term and long-term effects of the civil rights movement on college reading instruction?

2. How did the World War II era G.I. Bill influence the college reading programs of the latter 1940's and 1950's?

3. How has the economic movement from an industrial-based society to an information-processing and retrieval-oriented society influenced the college reading program?

Topic Two: Focusing on an Era

A specialist, interested in a broader scope of research, may well develop historical analyses of particular eras of college reading instruction. Historical eras should be delimited by

specific events or trends in the field. Possible questions to guide this line of research include:

1. Which individuals or institutions influenced the direction of college reading during the era in question?

2. Which research influenced the programs of the chosen era? Was the research directed at the college reading population? What were the classic studies of the era?

3. Which materials of instruction were used most widely during this time?

4. Which investigations or theories (both accepted and not accepted by professionals of the period) can be or should be re-evaluated with more modern tests?

Topic Three: Assessing the Impact of Individuals

Several avenues for research combine aspects of biography and historiography. Little has been done to chronicle and evaluate the professional contributions of now deceased college reading specialists from past eras. Examples of questions in this area include:

1. How did particular individuals influence the field of college reading? What were the major contributions of each individual? Did these contributions also have an impact on the overall field of reading instruction?

2. What other individuals influenced the professional work of the college reading specialists under study? Who were his or her mentors, advisers, colleagues, and graduate school

colleagues? Did the college reading specialist sire academic progeny who carried on his/her work?

3. How can the college reading specialist's work be evaluated in light of the "cutting-edge" research of the era? How does it fare, given the more recent findings of research in the field?

Topic Four: Consulting the Experienced

A profession which espouses innovative "cutting-edge" research and new theoretical models is in grave danger of losing the wisdom of those who have served the field over the years. Hence the authors believe that there is a need to conduct oral histories of college reading specialists who are in or approaching retirement. These individuals can provide valuable information about the eras during which they served. They may also share relevant historical anecdotes about important individuals from earlier academic generations. Examples of questions include:

1. What were the most popular materials of instruction when the individual began his or her career? What changes in instructional materials were observed over the years?

2. What were the important research investigations of the era when the specialist began his or her career? What research findings emerged as influential over the specialist's career?

3. How have the students enrolled in college reading courses changed over the years?

4. What college reading programs were considered to be model programs at various stages of the specialist's career?

5. What historical events (international, national, and local) influenced the scope and direction of the college reading program(s) with which the specialist was associated?

6. When the specialist entered the field, what did he or she expect for the future? What expectations came to pass? What trends were the most surprising? What new or innovative developments does the specialist predict for the future?

7. Which of the specialist's past writings or activities are personally viewed as important contributions to the field?

Topic Five: Noting Trends in Programs

With the changes in pedagogical thought over the years, many specialists assume that college reading programs have changed with the times. Yet general descriptions of trends in college reading programs (Manzo, 1983; Shaw, 1961; Walker, 1984) suggest that change may not be so readily visible. Consequently, there is a need to further collect, chronicle, and summarize the published descriptions of the college reading programs in existence throughout the past 85 years. Lowe's (1967) reviews of the surveys of college reading programs can serve as a guide for such an undertaking. Questions might include:

1. What were the characteristics of the average program in each era?

2. How have programs changed over the years?

3. What programs (institutions) appear to have made major contributions to the field?

As a related endeavor, an individual should be desigated in each program to conduct a particular historical case study. Such research is particularly relevant for programs in the Northeast and Midwest, which are of long duration. Resources might include articles, texts authored by faculty, oral interviews of faculty and alumni, summative evaluation reports, and technical reports. Perry's (1958) particularly important history of the Harvard program should be reviewed by any specialist undertaking such a task.

Topic Six: Tracing Changes in Materials

Since the early days of the century, texts and workbooks have been published for the college student desiring to improve his or her reading and study skills. Just how these materials have changed because of theory, research, or market forces has not been thoroughly documented. Hence there is a need to trace the changes over the past 85 years in the four common categories of texts or workbooks (reading, reading rate, study skills, and vocabulary development) found in college reading and study-skills labs and classes. Examples of possible research questions include:

1. In what eras did particular categories of texts emerge? What factors in educational history led to the need for such

materials? How has content and/or text design changed over the years?

2. What content, methods, techniques, and practice exercises have been included traditionally in texts for each category?

3. What factors led to the inclusion of various elements of content? How did the contemporary research of each historical period influence the content of the then current texts? Does current research and theory support the inclusion of traditional content (research or non-research based) in current texts and workbooks?

4. To what extent has tradition or research been the more important factor in determining content of texts and workbooks for college reading and study-skills instruction? How have these factors influenced marketing of materials?

Topic Seven: Observing Changes Across Textbook Editions

Researching a closely related topic calls for another form of historical content analysis. A successfully marketed text is likely to go through several editions and have marked impact on the field. During the revision process, the authors, with help from reviewers, may well incorporate the newest proven ideas in the field. Yet only through a historical content analysis of a series of successful texts can it be determined what forces, if any, promote change in the college reading curriculum. Thus the authors point to a need to trace the changes in specific texts

that have gone through multiple editions by authors such as Adams, Brown, Lewis, Miller, Pauk, Robinson, etc. Examples of questions include:

1. How did the first edition of a text vary from later editions? What content elements were deleted from edition to edition? What factors of then current research or theory may have influenced these additions or deletions? Could changes have been based on bandwagon effects of a particular era?

2. What does the deletion or inclusion of material from texts tell us about the transfer of applied research findings to the curriculum of the college reading program?

Topic Eight: Judging Innovation

As the field continues to develop upon an expanded technological foundation, new curricula and organizational patterns will come to the forefront. Yet, college reading specialists must ask themselves if these ideas are really new. For instance, several new computer programs designed to develop a student's reading rate contain questionable methods used routinely in the software for the teaching machines of the 1930's through the early 1960's. In this juncture, college reading specialists may recall the words of George Santayana: "When experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In heeding this warning, the authors suggest an urgent need for historical research which reviews the content of selected new materials,

such as texts or computer software, to determine whether research of the past or tradition has influenced the design of the materials. Questions include:

1. What inferences drawn from the existing research base can be generalized to the new materials?

2. Are the lessons or mistakes of the past being built into the curriculum of the future?

Topic Nine: Appraising Elements of Instrumentation

Along with a need for historical research centered on curricular materials, there is a need to trace the changes over the past 70 years in the instruments for measuring the competency of college students in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading rate, etc.

1. What instruments have been published over the years?

2. How have prevailing theories of reading and assessment influenced tests designed for this population?

3. Which instruments offered unique assessment procedures that eventually influenced the field?

Topic Ten: Creating Archives

Our final suggested avenue for historical research in college reading leads to a product which can preserve the curriculum and materials of the past for future generations. As existing programs procure new materials, older worn or expendable texts, machines, and tests are cast aside. As a result, new generations of specialists may lose touch with materials of the

past. The authors recommend that a researcher collaborate with a media specialist to develop a photographic account of the popular texts, machines, lab materials, testing instruments, etc., produced over the past 85 years for the college reading and study-skills market. Next, they might locate, chronicle, and summarize the published reviews and evaluations of these materials. The results of the investigation should be developed into a multi-media project that can be shared with programs that train college reading specialists.

The topics presented here do not begin to exhaust the realm of potential historical investigations in college reading. It has been the purpose of this article to propose practical topics that can be investigated with the methodologies of historiography, chronology, and content analysis, and that also address a range of programmatic and curricular concerns of the college reading specialist. For those wishing to undertake or evaluate such research for a paper, thesis, or dissertation, the discussion by Gilstad (1981) on the methodology of conducting historical research in the field of reading pedagogy promises to be of particular value.

A Closing Word

No field should be chained unduly to its past, for such rigidity can only lead to stagnation and academic sterility. At the same time, the college reading specialist of the 1980's and 1990's cannot afford to be ignorant of our heritage or, worse

yet, apathetic to its importance. Indeed, knowledge of our historical roots can help us to avoid contemporary illusions and misconceptions. Furthermore, such knowledge can aid us in selecting paths of meaningful progress over the years ahead. As Manzo (1983) points out, college reading is both a generator of new ideas and a repository of considerable wisdom. To stress the former at the expense of the latter does a disservice to the field. We must be forever cognizant that the varied parts of the past will add up to the sum which is our future. Knowledge and understanding of the parts will lead to a foreseeable and manageable future, while ignorance and apathy of them will promote unpredictability and potential chaos. Such is our legacy, such is our onus, and so shall be our future.

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Master List
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